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DE RUEHBK #3755/01 1900844
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 090844Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8138
INFO RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3330
RUEHVN/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE 3894
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1840

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 003755

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2017
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#) [LA](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY DISCUSSIONS WITH RTG ON HMONG AND NORTH
KOREAN REFUGEE ISSUES

REF: SECSTATE 88585

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH BOYCE, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a July 2 discussion with MFA PermSec, Ambassador encouraged RTG establishment of a screening mechanism for all Lao Hmong asylum seekers and movement of the Nong Khai Hmong to a more suitable location. The PermSec responded that the RTG was in a standoff with the Lao government on the Hmong issue. He said the Nong Kong Hmong would not be deported to Laos, but they would also not be allowed to resettle to third countries anytime soon. Embassy Political Counselor subsequently made points similar to those of the Ambassador in a separate meeting with the Thai NSC Deputy Secretary General. Political Counselor noted the availability of USG funding to assist in resolution of the Hmong issues. The Deputy Secretary General said it was current Thai policy to screen only those Hmong already registered at Petchaboon. The RTG would "do something" for those in this group who faced danger if returned to Laos, but would not talk publicly about it. Political Counselor expressed appreciation for RTG agreement to USG refugee resettlement processing for additional North Koreans. The USG hoped that the RTG had made a final decision that such cases would not have to go first to the ROK since that was not workable. Political Counselor also raised recent reports that the Thai military had not permitted some Burmese fleeing their country to enter Thailand. End summary.

Ambassador Discussion with MFA PermSec

¶2. (C) Drawing on reftel points, Ambassador raised Hmong refugee issues on July 2 with MFA PermSec Virasakdi Futrakul. Noting that he was acting on instructions, Ambassador encouraged RTG establishment of a screening system for Lao Hmong in Petchaboon Province and consultations with UNHCR on screening. He also encouraged Virasakdi to extend the screening to all Hmong asylum seekers in Thailand, not just those already registered by the RTG in Petchaboon. While expressing appreciation for the temporary asylum given to the Hmong at the Nong Khai Immigration Detention Center, Ambassador encouraged the RTG to transfer the group to another location with more humane living conditions.

¶3. (C) Virasakdi responded that the RTG felt it was between a rock and a hard place. The Lao government was saying that the RTG had no right to permit Hmong to be resettled to third countries. There was an implied threat behind this position: if the RTG permitted departures to other countries, the Lao would not take back any of the Hmong. Virasakdi reiterated the RTG position that the Nong Khai group would not be deported. At the same time, they would not be allowed to

resettle to third countries anytime soon. Virasakdi noted that the RTG was working on a Hmong screening system. He said he had argued to the Thai National Security Council that screening should be extended to new Hmong arrivals, but the RTG had not yet made a decision on the issue.

14. (C) Ambassador did not have an opportunity to raise the North Korean refugee issue directly with PermSec Virasakdi. Subsequently, Embassy sent over written points to Virasakdi which: expressed appreciation for the RTG's approval of USG resettlement processing of additional North Korean refugees; noted that during earlier RTG consideration of this issue, some in the RTG were pressing for USG resettlement processing of North Korean refugees to occur in South Korea and proposed this formally to the ROKG; stated that the USG did not think this proposal was workable given that North Koreans become South Korean citizens upon arrival on South Korean soil and are not eligible for resettlement to a third country; and expressed hope that the RTG had made a final decision on this issue.

Thai NSC Deputy Secretary General on Hmong and North Korean Refugee Issues

15. (C) Political Counselor met with NSC Deputy Secretary General Tawin Pleansri on July 5 to discuss Lao Hmong, North Korean, and Burmese refugee issues. Political Counselor said the USG understood that the Lao Hmong issue and dealing with the Lao government were difficult. She noted that the move of the Petchaboon Hmong to a new site seemed to be going well. The USG understood that the RTG was working on a screening system. This was a welcome development. She encouraged drawing on the model of the Provincial Admissions Boards (PABs) established for Burmese refugees and consulting with UNHCR. Political Counselor urged that the RTG screen all Hmong asylum seekers, not just those already registered at Petchaboon. The USG would consider providing training assistance for a screening system. The USG also would consider funding the MSF assistance program in Petchaboon.

16. (C) Political Counselor emphasized that some Hmong were genuinely in need of refugee protection. The Hmong minors irregularly deported by the Thai to Laos in December 2005 were a case in point. The USG hoped that it was not RTG policy to deport to Laos those who faced the threat of mistreatment. At the same time, the USG recognized that some Hmong were economic migrants or came to Thailand seeking third country resettlement. The USG had repeatedly told the Hmong-American community that there would not be another large Hmong resettlement program. Political Counselor also encouraged Tawin to move the Nong Khai Hmong to a location with more humane living conditions and to handle any such move carefully and with advance notice to the Hmong so they would not panic.

17. (C) Tawin responded that it was current RTG policy to screen only those Hmong already registered at Petchaboon. The RTG had to look carefully at the larger picture. If screening were applied to all Hmong, the RTG would have to establish a similar screening system for North Koreans. The RTG believed that only a small percentage of the Petchaboon group faced political persecution if deported to Laos. The RTG was currently setting up a screening system. The RTG would cooperate with the Lao government to return those screened out to Laos. Tawin emphasized that, at the same time, the RTG would "do something" for those who would face danger if sent back. However, the RTG would not talk publicly about this. (Note: Tawin did not explain what "do something" meant. Presumably it means such persons would not be sent back to Laos.) The RTG was planning on providing training to the screeners, who would be RTG officials only. While expressing appreciation for the offer of USG assistance for training screeners, Tawin said it was not needed. The NSC representatives later welcomed, however, U.S. assistance through MSF to the Hmong in Petchaboon and potentially to help relocate the group in Nong Khai.

¶18. (C) Tawin said that the RTG was looking for another location for the Nong Khai Hmong, especially the women and children. He said, "trust me," the group would not be deported. The RTG intended to move them to another Immigration facility where they would be held until the acrimonious atmosphere with the Lao government on this group abated.

¶19. (C) In response to a question on the status of the Vang Pao arrest case, Political Counselor stated that the accused were innocent until proven guilty. The case would likely not go to trial until 2008. There could be lengthy proceedings. So far, the Lao government response had been restrained. However, the Lao seemed to have taken some small positive steps in response.

¶10. (C) Political Counselor expressed appreciation for the RTG decision to permit additional processing of North Koreans for U.S. resettlement. She noted that some in the RTG seemed to have wanted to require that such cases be sent first to South Korea. This could not work under South Korean law and so was unacceptable to the USG. Political Counselor expressed hope that the RTG had made a final decision on the issue. The USG would continue to handle the North Korean refugee issue discreetly. It was notable that after about one year, the number of North Korean refugees in Thailand interested in U.S. resettlement was relatively small.

Burma Refugee Issue

¶11. (C) Political Counselor noted recent reports that the Thai military had not permitted two groups of Burmese refugees, totalling 300 persons, to enter Thailand. She stated that the PABs seemed to be working well and expressed hope that new Burmese arrivals fleeing fighting or political persecution would be permitted to enter Thailand and have their cases heard by the PABs. Burmese military activities against ethnic groups were continuing. This was a factor behind the cross-border movements.

¶12. (C) Tawin responded that he had not seen the reports. The PABs were intended to hear the cases of new arrivals. At the same time, resettlement programs in the Burma border camps had created a pull factor which was bringing more Burmese into Thailand. The RTG had held some initial discussions with UNHCR on improving the PAB process, including using new UNHCR methods, including prescreening, for dealing with mixed migration movements that included both legitimate refugees and economic migrants.

BOYCE